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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the employment of gay teachers. Two aspects of personality that are important characteristics for teacher effectiveness, acceptance of self and acceptance of others, are compared; and differences in identity formation and identity management in relation to these characteristics are explored. Two questionnaires (one demographic and the other "Berger's Acceptance of Self and Others") were administered to gay subjects (N=75) and heterosexual subjects (N=66). Results indicate: (1) demographic differences exist between gay and heterosexual subsamples; (2) gay respondents were younger, attained higher academic degrees, were more likely to teach humanities, arts, and athletics, and to be employed in public rather than in private or religious schools; and (3) there were no differences between gay and heterosexual respondents on the personality characteristics of acceptance of self and acceptance of others. The data suggest that prejudice against gays and lesbians is unwarranted if a critical teacher characteristic is acceptance of self and others. These findings may serve to encourage admission of gay teachers to educational training and may encourage teachers to be more open about their affectional orientation. (LL)

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**Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Teachers:  
Acceptance of Self, Acceptance of Others,  
Affectional and Lifestyle Orientation**

by: Martin Mayer, Ed.D.

Introduction

This research combines one of the most controversial issues in education, the employment of gay teachers, with two of the most fundamental concepts in psychology, acceptance of self and acceptance of others. Acceptance of self and others by gay and heterosexual teachers, as two aspects of personality that are important teacher characteristics, were compared. In addition, the differences in identity formation and identity management and their relation to acceptance of self and others within a gay teacher subsample were explored. Gay teachers who disclose their gay identity may feel discriminated against because of their affectional orientation and this research explored some of the ways that gay identity is managed by teachers.

Theorists of gay identity formation propose that acceptance of self and others are achieved differently by gay people than by heterosexual people. The research on teacher effectiveness indicated that acceptance of self and others are important characteristics for teachers. This

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study draws upon research that explored the relationship among teacher acceptance of self, acceptance of others, classroom outcomes, and research on the difference between gay and heterosexual identity formation.

#### Review of the Literature

This study was based on the theory of gay identity development by Troiden (1989), Cass (1979), and others (Coleman, 1981; Dank, 1971; Minton & McDonald, 1983) who defined stages of gay identity development based on the psychosocial stage theory of Erikson (1960). According to the theories of gay identity development, gay individuals experience greater acceptance of self and others in successive stages. The lower stages are characterized by low acceptance of self and others; identity is questioned and others are seen as disparaging and nonaccepting. At the higher stages, acceptance of self is achieved, and others are accepted regardless of their affectional orientation. Disclosure of gay identity was seen by many theorists as necessary for attainment of the highest stage of identity formation. Some theorists contended that discrimination after disclosure can hinder acceptance of self and others, but that gay persons who complete the tasks of identity development will develop acceptance of self and others.

Educators have recognized acceptance of self and acceptance of others as important teaching characteristics. Coopersmith (1981), Purkey and Novak (1984), Borba (1989),

Rogers (1969), and Moustakas (1966) are among many who devised teaching techniques based on theories of acceptance of self and others. Owens (1988), Shull (1981), McNergney and Satterstrom (1984), and Noad (1979) were among the researchers who found positive and statistically significant relationships between teacher acceptance of self and classroom outcomes.

The sociocultural setting makes disclosure of gay identity, and thus acceptance of self, difficult for gay teachers. Three discriminatory aspects of society include religion, law, and science. Education in the United States has a long-standing traditional association with fundamentalist religious sects, whose conservative, anti-gay attitudes are part of our Puritan heritage (Harbeck, 1987). The scientific community became interested in the phenomena of affectional orientation only at the beginning of the 20th century. Early researchers attempted to find psychopathology in gay people. Except for some studies with questionable methodology, psychopathology in gay samples was not found (Ruse, 1988). The legal issues evolved beginning in the 1950s, and most recently, courts demanded that dismissed gay teachers be proven professionally incompetent or reinstated (Harbeck, 1987).

Although many localities have passed ordinances protecting gay teachers, discrimination is still widespread. Because education remains so discriminatory toward gay

people, it is a difficult profession in which to disclose gay identity. Discriminatory attitudes make it difficult for gay teachers to disclose personal information to colleagues, administrators, or students.

In addition to the damage to acceptance of self and others, discrimination against gay teachers makes it difficult for gay teachers to appear as role models for the approximately 10% gay students in the schools. The gay students and teachers are forced to live a double life. The inability to share personal experiences and struggles with others denies nurturing and encouragement to gay students as well as teachers.

The following were the research questions explored in this study.

1. What is the relationship between teacher affectional orientation and acceptance of self?
2. What is the relationship between teacher affectional orientation and acceptance of others?
3. What is the difference between the relationship between acceptance of self and acceptance of others for the two affectional orientation groups?
4. What is the relationship between gay identity management strategy (passing, covering, implicitly out, and explicitly out) and acceptance of self?
5. What is the relationship between gay identity management strategy and acceptance of others?

6. What is the relationship between gay teachers' perception of discrimination against them and acceptance of self?

7. What is the relationship between gay teachers' perception of discrimination against them and acceptance of others?

8. Is acceptance of self related to the choice of categories of people (friends, family, colleagues, administrators, or students) to whom a gay teacher discloses gay identity?

9. Is acceptance of others related to the choice of categories of people (friends, family, colleagues, administrators, students) to whom gay teachers disclose gay identity?

10. Is acceptance of self by gay teachers related to membership in a gay professional organization?

11. Is acceptance of others by gay teachers related to membership in a gay professional organization?

12. What is the relationship between self-reported integration of gay identity and acceptance of self?

13. What is the relationship between self-reported integration of gay identity and acceptance of others?

#### Methodology

Acceptance of self (AS) and acceptance of others (AO) were measured by Berger's (1952) Acceptance of Self and Others (ASO) instrument. A Demographic Questionnaire (DQ)

also was used to gather information about each subject's age, gender, affectional orientation, public or private employment, county of employment, years of teaching experience, grade level taught, educational level, academic subject area of teaching, ethnic background, religious affiliation, length of relationships, and for the gay subjects, identity management strategies, disclosure of identity, integration of identity, and membership in gay organizations. Subjects included 75 gay and 66 heterosexual teachers from private, religious, and public schools, all ages, grade levels, and academic disciplines.

The gay and heterosexual subsamples were compared on AS and AO scores using point-biserial correlation coefficients, and the Pearson product-moment correlations of AS and AO scores between the two subsamples were compared using a Fisher  $z$  transformation. Chi-square analyses were used to determine if there were any differences between the gay and heterosexual subsamples based on each demographic variable on categorical scales. One-way ANOVAs also were used to determine if any of the demographic variables were related to different AS or AO scores. One and two-way ANOVAs and  $t$  tests were used to determine if there were any differences within the gay subsample divided into subgroups based on identity management strategy, groups to whom gay identity was disclosed, perceived discrimination, membership in gay professional organizations, and integration of gay identity

into personal and professional life. Only the statistically significant findings are reported herein except for the first three research questions which are reported in their entirety.

### Results

There were demographic differences between the gay and heterosexual subsamples (see Table 1). The gay respondents were younger than the heterosexual respondents. In spite of the younger age of the gay respondents, there were fewer gay than heterosexual teachers in the 20-29 age range. Contrary to what might be expected in a younger age group, the gay respondents attained higher academic degrees than did the heterosexual respondents. In addition, the gay respondents were equal in years of teaching experience to the heterosexual respondents, even though the gay respondents were younger. Despite the younger age, the gay respondents were more likely than the heterosexual respondents to teach in high school and college. Consistent with the younger age, however, the gay respondents had shorter affectional relationships than did the heterosexual sample, the greatest difference being in the category of relationships longer than 10 years.

There was also a difference in gender between the two affectional orientation subgroups. The sample contained more female than male heterosexuals. Gay respondents were more likely to teach humanities, arts, and athletics,

whereas the heterosexual respondents were more likely to teach science, mathematics, or computer science. Gay teachers also were more likely to be employed in public than in private or religious schools than were their heterosexual counterparts.

In answer to the first three research questions there was no difference between mean AS scores or mean AO scores, or in the correlation of AS and AO scores between the gay and heterosexual subsamples (table 2); Higher AO scores were noted for: (a) gay teachers who felt they had been discriminated against as gay teachers (table 4), (b) teachers who disclosed their gay identity to colleagues and students (table 5), (c) lesbians (table 3), (d) teachers of lower grades for the sample as a whole (table 3). Higher AS scores were associated with: (a) those who integrated gay identity into their personal lives (table 4), (b) younger gay teachers (table 3). The .05 level of confidence was used in all statistical analyses.

The following statistics describe the lifestyle orientation of the gay subjects. The least popular identity management strategy used was passing (8%), while the most popular was being implicitly out (51%). Covering and being explicitly out were the strategies used by 18% and 27% respectively. Reporting that they had never been discriminated against as gay teachers were 34% of the gay subjects, while 66% reported having been discriminated

against. The categories of disclosure formed a continuum with most gay subjects being open to friends (92%), but relatively few, (24%) being open to students. The percents for open to family, colleagues, and administrators, were 74%, 63%, and 53% respectively.

### Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrated that there were no differences between gay and heterosexual teacher respondents on the personality characteristics of acceptance of self and acceptance of others. This finding is consistent with theories of gay identity development that contended that when a gay person proceeds through the gay identity development process, acceptance of self and acceptance of others is achieved. Even though the gay subsample was younger overall, there were fewer gay than heterosexual respondents in the 20-30 age range. It is this age range, according to research findings of Troiden (1989), in which gay men and women are still struggling with acceptance of self and acceptance of others, and an age during which gay people need to feel accepted by others, and it is a particularly painful and vulnerable time for a gay person to feel discriminated against. It is possible that once the gay identity process is completed, gay people entered the teaching profession because acceptance or rejection by others was no longer critical to the gay person's acceptance of self, hence more gay teachers are in

the 30-40 year range and older.

The finding that those teachers who felt they had been discriminated against as gay teachers had higher AO scores than those who did not feel they had been discriminated against contradicts the findings of Green and Waxman (1987) who found that Blacks who felt discriminated against were less accepting of others. There are too many differences between the Black and the gay experiences of discrimination to draw any meaningful conclusions. The finding of the present study, however, might lead to a hypothesis that gay people who perceive themselves as discriminated against develop a greater sense of empathetic understanding of others than do gay people who do not perceive themselves as discriminated against or that defense mechanisms that support self-esteem are more highly developed because of discrimination.

Of the gay teachers, only 34% felt that they had been discriminated against compared to 40% in a study by Petersen (1988). The decreasing percent over time may be an indication of changing attitudes or it may reflect regional differences (i.e., the San Francisco Bay Area being more tolerant). The declining discrimination may also be attributable to the way gay teachers manage their identity; the rate of disclosure is much less when the risk is perceived to be greater and teachers may have learned to be more sophisticated and careful in choosing a forum for

disclosure. Teachers who disclosed to students showed a trend toward the highest AO scores which might confirm the Cass (1979) theory that at the highest level of AO gay people are not concerned about the consequence of rejection or acceptance by others.

Dissimilar to a study by Feo (1986), there was no indication, on the one hand, that integration of gay identity into professional life was necessary for gay identity development. On the other hand, integration of gay identity into personal life was found to be related to AO in the present study.

Given the use of analyses that describe relationships rather than causes, it is not possible to conclude that teachers should disclose gay identity to colleagues or students in order to improve acceptance of others, or that gay teachers lose their acceptance of others as they get older. Even though there is evidence that gay people need to integrate gay identity into their personal lives, it is possible that only people who are self-accepting to begin with integrate gay identity into their personal lives, and that counseling might be sought by those who feel conflict in this area.

The inverse relationship between AO scores and age for the gay subsample might suggest a change in the gay identity development theory, suggesting the possibility that it takes years of being discriminated against before acceptance of

others is affected, and the younger teachers have not yet felt the effects of discrimination. An alternative explanation is that the older gay teachers lived through eras of different values, and AO may be a product of the times in which a person develops.

### Conclusions

Even though the attitudes that make it difficult for gay people to secure and maintain teaching positions are ingrained in our culture, results of this research suggest that the prejudice is unwarranted if one of the most critical teacher characteristics is acceptance of self and acceptance of others. The above findings may serve to encourage admission of gay teachers in educational training and the selection of gay teacher applicants and it also may encourage teachers to be more open about their affectional orientation.

Gay teachers are needed as role models for the estimated millions of gay youths who are vulnerable to chemical dependence, suicide, and other consequences of low self-esteem. With the AIDS epidemic in full force, it is a matter of life and death to young gay people who need responsible role models and counselors. As information, such as this study, becomes available, knowledge rather than prejudice may begin to guide the public conscience regarding gay teachers, and, perhaps gay teachers will take their rightful place among the rich diversity of personnel in schools.

Table 1

Chi-Square Comparison Between Heterosexual and Gay Teachers  
on the Background Variable of Age: Test Statistics (n=141)

| Group                            | Hetero-<br>sexual<br>(n = 66) |     | Gay<br>(n = 75) |     | Chi<br>Square | df | p      |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|---------------|----|--------|
| 20 - 29                          | 13                            | 20% | 7               | 9%  | 10.83         | 4  | 0.03*  |
| 30 - 39                          | 12                            | 18% | 29              | 39% |               |    |        |
| 40 - 49                          | 30                            | 45% | 24              | 32% |               |    |        |
| 50 - 59                          | 10                            | 15% | 11              | 15% |               |    |        |
| 60+                              | 1                             | 2%  | 4               | 5%  |               |    |        |
| Female                           | 52                            | 79% | 30              | 40% | 20.14         | 1  | .001*  |
| Male                             | 14                            | 21% | 45              | 60% |               |    |        |
| Public                           | 17                            | 26% | 62              | 83% | 46.19         | 2  | .0001* |
| Private                          | 36                            | 54% | 10              | 13% |               |    |        |
| Private/<br>Religious            | 13                            | 20% | 3               | 4%  |               |    |        |
| High School                      | 2                             | 3%  | 2               | 3%  |               |    |        |
| Bachelors                        | 42                            | 64% | 23              | 31% | 19.15         | 4  | .001*  |
| Masters                          | 20                            | 30% | 35              | 46% |               |    |        |
| Doctorate                        | 2                             | 3%  | 14              | 19% |               |    |        |
| Other                            | 0                             | 0%  | 1               | 1%  |               |    |        |
| Mathematics,<br>Computer Science | 10                            | 15% | 6               | 8%  |               |    |        |
| Physical Science                 | 19                            | 29% | 26              | 35% | 13.99         | 5  | .02*   |
| Humanities                       | 2                             | 3%  | 1               | 2%  |               |    |        |
| Foreign Language                 | 1                             | 2%  | 7               | 9%  |               |    |        |
| Art, Music, Drama                | 0                             | 0%  | 7               | 9%  |               |    |        |
| Athletics                        | 34                            | 51% | 28              | 37% |               |    |        |
| Other                            | 36                            | 57% | 20              | 27% |               |    |        |
| K-6                              | 8                             | 13% | 12              | 16% |               |    |        |
| 7-8                              | 8                             | 13% | 22              | 29% | 14.09         | 3  | .003*  |
| 9-12                             | 11                            | 17% | 21              | 28% |               |    |        |
| College                          | 1                             | 2%  | 3               | 4%  |               |    |        |
| Less than 1 year                 | 3                             | 4%  | 7               | 9%  |               |    |        |
| 1 to 2 years                     | 4                             | 6%  | 9               | 12% |               |    |        |
| 2 to 3 years                     | 20                            | 30% | 30              | 40% | 11.61         | 5  | .04*   |
| 3 to 10 years                    | 37                            | 56% | 22              | 30% |               |    |        |
| 10 +                             | 1                             | 2%  | 4               | 5%  |               |    |        |
| No relationship                  |                               |     |                 |     |               |    |        |

\*  $p \leq .05$ , significant

Table 2

Results of the Point Biserial Correlation Coefficient for  
Gay and Heterosexual Acceptance of Self and Others Scores  
(n=141)

|    | Orientation  | N  | Mean   | SD    | r    | p   |
|----|--------------|----|--------|-------|------|-----|
| AS | Heterosexual | 66 | 151.47 | 23.07 | -.08 | .30 |
|    | Gay          | 75 | 147.49 | 25.75 |      |     |
| AO | Heterosexual | 66 | 115.59 | 9.99  | .09  | .29 |
|    | Gay          | 75 | 113.69 | 11.25 |      |     |

Table 3

Result of ANOVAs of Acceptance of Other Scores Among Age Groups and  
Gender for the Gay Subsample and Grade Level for the Gay and  
Heterosexual Subsamples Combined (n = 141)

|             | N  | X(AO)  | df | SS      | MS      | F    | p     |
|-------------|----|--------|----|---------|---------|------|-------|
| Age         |    |        |    |         |         |      |       |
| 20-29       | 7  | 118.43 | 4  | 1267.76 | 316.94  | 2.74 | .04*  |
| 30-39       | 29 | 114.61 |    |         |         |      |       |
| 40-49       | 24 | 113.83 |    |         |         |      |       |
| 50-59       | 11 | 113.73 |    |         |         |      |       |
| 60+         | 4  | 97.25  |    |         |         |      |       |
| Gender      |    |        |    |         |         |      |       |
| Male        | 45 | 110.64 | 1  | 1045.77 | 1045.77 | 9.18 | .003* |
| Female      | 30 | 118.27 |    |         |         |      |       |
| Grade Level |    |        |    |         |         |      |       |
| K-6         | 56 | 117.38 | 3  | 1113.43 | 371.14  | 3.34 | .02*  |
| 7-8         | 20 | 111.75 |    |         |         |      |       |
| 9-12        | 30 | 110.10 |    |         |         |      |       |
| College     | 32 | 115.70 |    |         |         |      |       |
| Missing     | 3  |        |    |         |         |      |       |

Table 4

Result of t Tests of Acceptance of Self and Acceptance of Other Scores Among Gay Subsample for Perceived Discrimination and Integration of Identity Into Personal and Professional Life (n=74)

|                              | N  | Xao    | SDao  | df | t    | p     |
|------------------------------|----|--------|-------|----|------|-------|
| Discrimination               |    |        |       |    |      |       |
| Perceived Discrimination     | 49 | 116.18 | 10.82 |    |      |       |
| No perceived Discrimination  | 25 | 108.92 | 10.94 |    |      |       |
|                              |    |        |       | 72 | 2.72 | .008* |
| Integration                  | N  | Xas    | SDas  |    |      |       |
| Personal Only                | 34 | 150.32 | 20.49 |    |      |       |
| Neither Personal Nor Private | 35 | 131.80 | 16.48 |    |      |       |
|                              |    |        |       | 37 | 1.92 | .03*  |

Table 5

Results of ANOVA of Acceptance of Other Scores Among Disclosure Groups for the Gay Subsample (n=74)

|            | N  | SS     | MS     | df | F    | p    |
|------------|----|--------|--------|----|------|------|
| Disclosure |    |        |        |    |      |      |
| Friends    | 69 | 105.74 | 105.74 | 1  | 0.83 | .36  |
| Family     | 55 | 236.44 | 236.44 | 1  | 1.88 | .17  |
| Colleagues | 47 | 486.72 | 486.72 | 1  | 4.00 | .05* |
| Admin.     | 39 | .05    | .05    | 1  | 0.00 | .98  |
| Students   | 18 | 450.69 | 450.69 | 1  | 3.69 | .06  |

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